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ABSTRACT

This critique by the Washington Higher Education Secretariat, which is composed of the Washington based higher education associations, views the Newman Report on Higher Education as "a curious reflection of well intentioned concern," but based on inadequate research in the field. This impression is supported by examples and the critique concludes by stating that what higher education needs is not concentration on its problem areas, but more explication of specific programs based on a sound perception of needs, and a wider dissemination of information about what is being done to cope with these problems by numerous institutions and groups. (AF)

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CRITIQUE* OF NEWMAN REPORT

The Newman Report on Higher Education is a curious reflection of well intentioned concern based on selective reading and incomplete investigation.

The document restates familiar criticisms. It is replete with internal contradictions, and ignores the existence of a vast number of recommendations that respond specifically and directly to the issues it raises, while merely alluding to a few recommendations in its footnotes and text.

It is a damaging report to the extent that, contrary to the Secretary's Foreword, it creates scapegoats. Its dissemination--already begun--will intensify the antagonism of opinion leaders and legislators who are suspicious of higher education. Some prominent educators have already indicated their judgment that it will erode support for higher education.

As one commentator put it: "The Newman Report, by lumping together the problems of boredom at Harvard, and the lack of cost effectiveness in graduate language departments, with the alleged or real lack of innovative programs at two-year colleges, does a disservice to every junior and senior college student who is trying to get an education or upgrade his skills."

It is really a "non-report"--too long and pejorative as a briefing memo, too short as a scholarly examination. To the informed reader it is provoking rather than provocative. To the uninformed it presents a distorted and misleading description of the problem and possibilities for solution.

Since no one likes to be told his child is ugly, the major higher education associations will--as a result of these reactions--predictably be accused of paranoia, defensiveness, and blind support of the status quo. No disclaimers will soften such indictments. The following comments, however, support the conclusions stated.

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* Offered by Washington Higher Education Secretariat: American Association for Higher Education, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, American Association of Junior Colleges, American Association of State Colleges and Universities, American Association of University Professors, American Council on Education, Association of American Colleges, Association of American Universities, Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges, Council of Graduate Schools in the U.S., National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, National Catholic Educational Association - College and University Department, National Commission on Accrediting.

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What Does the Report Say?

Three sentences in the Report represent convenient handles by which to grasp its essential weaknesses. These are weaknesses both in concept and in content.

> ONE: "The needs and the diversity of students now entering college require a fresh look at what 'going to college' means."

This is an unexceptional statement. The implication, however, that the Newman Report will supply this "fresh look" is inescapable. It is also misleading.

The Report is a Reader's Digest version of Jenck's and Riesman's The Academic Revolution ("Many of our points are based on, or run parallel to, the observations made in this superb study."), combined with an unspecified number of conversations with largely unidentified persons.

But there is another, and more damaging, defect in a report which purports to describe a situation and, instead, combines description with value judgments. By condensation of source material, or by failure to recognize conflicting data, a wholly false impression is left with the reader.

> For example: The Report quotes Ivar Berg to the effect that college-educated persons did not perform better than high school graduates at a number of jobs. The Report failed to mention studies by Gary Becker and by Weisbrod and Karpoff of Bell System employees which concluded to the contrary.

> For example: In the discussion of "dropouts," the Report sets the base as graduation within four years of entrance despite the more generally accepted standard of five years. Elsewhere in the Report the authors are concerned that students don't more generally drop in and out--completing their education at their own pace. Further: 50 percent dropout figures do not represent involuntary departure from college. According to the Coleman Report, 18 percent of high school seniors going on to college don't plan to get a degree--only about 60 percent of college dropouts can be considered involuntary.

> For example: The Report expresses concern with the emphasis employers place on accreditation as a condition of employment. This is a commentary on employers, not a reflection primarily on educators. The Federal government is not blameless in this dependence on accreditation as evidenced by its requirements for FSEEs at entry levels as low as Grade 7. And it will get worse as local governments follow the lead of the Federal government: The U. S. Department of Labor

> estimates that, by 1980, employment by state and local governments will rise by 52 percent, representing the largest percentage and numerical increase--4.7 million--of any "industry."

Demi-facts and semi-truths show up throughout the Report. Their not being willful makes them no less damaging. In a synoptic document it is difficult, of course, to combine analysis with philosophic perspective.

> TWO: "Their recommendations /those of other commissions examining higher education/ are intended to strengthen and extend the existing system. We have taken a different approach."

This statement could be translated to read "All these other persons are just issuing reports to insure the status quo. We are going to focus on changing it so that it may better serve students and society."

Such a concept of what is happening to the heavily researched and examined system of higher education is astonishing--particularly, in light of the Report's own footnotes which refer to conversations with Clark Kerr and cite such Carnegie Commission Reports as Less Time, More Options.

In fact, almost every topic of the Newman Report has been researched and has elicited specific recommendations. Individuals, commissions, and agencies have, at considerable expense and often in great detail, explored every area in which the Newman Report has pointed out shortcomings.

> For example: There is the 600-odd page "Report Prepared for the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Commission on Higher Education by Public Policy Research Organization at the University of California, Irvine" entitled More Scholars Per Dollar. It consumed eighteen months under the direction of Alex Mood. It includes discussions, recommendations, estimates for items such as "Education, Life Style and Elite Careers," "Higher Education and the World of Work," "Allocating of a University's Resources to Instruction," and chapter 8 devotes itself to a novel one-year plan of formal education combined with apprenticeships. (Last fall, ACE commissioned a paper by Dr. Mood for its 1971 Annual Meeting on the topic of "Other Options"--a demonstration of the Council's long-standing support of innovation.)

> For example: The Report, after citing some examples of providing greater access to higher education through technology, points out that "only the imagination and commitment are lacking." This matter of technology has been extensively explored with dollars and cents price tags by the Perkins Commission report, Instructional Broadcasting: A Design for the Future.

> For example: Did the authors examine the list of materials available in the USOE ERIC System--papers and studies (some funded by USOE, itself) on topics discussed in their Report? The list covers subjects as diverse as consortia, compensatory programs for disadvantaged students and include the cited study by Amitai Etzioni.

It is self-serving but irresistible, to call attention to the educational associations' efforts to commission, to disseminate, and to bring up for discussion materials on items such as accreditation, curriculum reform, new ways to interest students. (See, for example, Martin Trow's paper for the ACE 1970 Annual Meeting, "Admissions and the Crisis in Higher Education.")

A document thicker than the Newman Report could be produced to demonstrate the inaccuracy of the Report's implication that no effort is being made "to create a diverse and responsive system."

The issue is not that no attention is being given to the problem. It is rather the question of "why aren't the goals which have been widely examined and discussed, arrived at sooner?" The answer, according to the authors of the Report, is the intransigence of the higher education establishment.

> THREE: "The system, with its massive inertia, resists fundamental change, rarely eliminates outmoded programs, ignores the differing needs of students, seldom questions its educational goals, and almost never creates new and different types of institutions."

So unbalanced a statement falls of its own weight. Actually and for some unexplained reason, the authors (one page earlier) contradict themselves by saying

> "The 1950s and '60s were decades of unprecedented development and remarkable accomplishment in American higher education....Access to college widened steadily. Inequality of opportunity among economic and ethnic groups, long a factor preventing social mobility, was at last widely-recognized as a national concern, and steps were taken toward correction. Greater opportunity was accorded each undergraduate to influence his own curriculum. Graduate education developed a level of scholarly excellence that became the envy of the world."

It is difficult to reconcile these two statements. Clearly, the authors of the Report are more persuaded of the accuracy of the indictment than of the praise.

But the central mistake of the authors in their indictment, stated or implied throughout the Report, is to consider the system of higher education as monolithic. It is rather, as Harold Howe is fond of describing it, "a non-system." As professors, let the authors of the Report test the accuracy of this. How do they stand on issues such as tenure, work load, released time for research? How closely do their views on these matters correspond with those of other professors?

Similarly, all institutions of higher education do not share the same commitments, biases, and goals. Nor should they. There are many roads to salvation--and presumably to damnation.

Institutions, not "the establishment," are engaging in the following activities--many of which, presumably, would be acceptable to the authors of the Report.

> For example: The Report calls for more attention to "independent" study. Dressel and Thomson, in their unpublished manuscript, Survey of Independent Study Practices, describe the experiences of 372 institutions with independent studies (cited by Mayhew, College Board Review, Spring 1971). The net finding: independent studies are no more effective than classroom teaching.

For example: The Report suggests that junior colleges increasingly are becoming pallid imitations of four-year colleges as a result of pressure from senior colleges and state boards. The Report ignores a very important counter-tendency engaged in by many junior college educators, state officials, and national leaders. As junior colleges have gained political strength, they have had more autonomy and power in many ways to prevent overly traditionalist requirements. It is simply not true that a great many innovative local leaders have been wiped out by state boards.

For example: The Report calls for "new resources for off-campus education." The "open university" is one of the most talked about concepts in higher education. Nineteen colleges and universities are engaged in the University Without Walls project: Antioch, Bard, Chicago State, Friends World, Goddard, Loretto Heights, Morgan State, Northeastern Illinois State, Roger Williams, Skidmore, Staten Island Community, New and Stephens colleges, Massachusetts, Minnesota, South Carolina, Howard, New York, and Shaw universities.

And one of the most ambitious projects in this field is being activated by that "over-centralized, bureaucratic institution," the University of the State of New York.

Conclusion

Few would argue that enough is being done to meet the changing needs of students and society: More persons resist than welcome change--an unhappy condition of life.

What are the alternatives?

Do the authors of the Report mean to imply that some central authority should examine student needs, set up institutions to serve their diverse objectives, and then assign students to the appropriate institutions? We doubt that they would recommend such an approach.

Are they saying that not enough thought has been given to the fundamental issues, or that not enough exposure has been given to the proposals coming out of other study groups and commissions?

Or, are they saying that few institutions are doing enough, fast enough?

If the last item is what they believe, then they haven't said it.

Higher education has been assailed for a long time with general talk about the weaknesses that prevent it from doing a better job. What it requires is not more exposure of weaknesses, but more explication of specific programs based on a sound perception of needs and testing programs for cost-effectiveness.

Finally, what is needed to move toward educational goals is wider exposure to what is being done by numerous (if too few) individual institutions and groups. Others may then follow and adapt.

The other alternative is burn the house down and start all over again.

Additional Note

The recent interim report by the President of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Alan Pifer, is in sharp contrast to the tone and content of the Newman Report. After describing briefly the work to date of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education which the Carnegie Corporation is supporting at the rate of approximately $1 million a year for five years, the Report concludes by saying

> "Two principal themes have emerged from the Commission's work as it has progressed. The first is that higher education in the United States is in need of some major reforms that will make it more readily available to all who are capable of benefiting from it, more flexible in its structure, more efficiently managed and more responsive to students. Some of these reforms will require additional funding, but others can produce substantial savings.

"The second major theme is that, despite the need for reform and despite a good deal of current public disenchantment with higher education, there is much that is good in the enterprise, and it remains as indispensable to the nation as ever. The importance of higher education to our economic well-being, to our social progress, to our security and to individual fulfillment is undiminished. The case, therefore, for continued investment in our colleges and universities and in the students who attend them cannot be questioned."

4/8/71